

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ASMARA 00006 041432Z
ACTION SS-25

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FM AMCONSUL ASMARA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4304
AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
INFO AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 0006

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR SU ET US
SUBJECT: USG/GOS RELATIONS

REF: ADDIS ABABA 0016

1. WE CONCUR WITH REFTEL THAT TO TERM ELF AS "CONSERVATIVE" IN CONTEXT OF OVERALL POLITICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC PHILOSOPHY IS INACCURATE. ON VARIOUS OCCASIONS WE HAVE DESCRIBED THE ELF AS A "CONSERVATIVE, MUSLIM" ORGANIZATION, BUT THIS HAS ALWAYS BEEN IN RELATION TO THE MARXIST-ORIENTED PLF. THE LONG-TIME LEADERS OF THE ELF WHO WERE INVOLVED IN LEGITIMATE POLITICS IN ERITREA DURING THE FEDERATION (1952-62) WERE NEITHER MARXISTS NOR SOCIALISTS. EQUALLY, THEIR ADHERENCE TO ISLAM NEVER CAUSED THEM TO OPPOSE UNIVERSAL EDUCATION OR OTHER MEASURES WHICH MIGHT BE INTERPRETED AS EFFORTS TO WEAKEN RELIGIOUS LOYALTY. UPON BECOMING LEADERS OF AN INSURGENT MOVEMENT, THEY CONTINUED TO ESCHEW MARXIST JARGON, PAYING LIP SERVICE ONLY WHEN COMPELLED TO DO SO IN ORDER TO OBTAIN ASSISTANCE FROM MARXIST-ORIENTED ARAB STATES.

2. AS TO WHETHER THE ELF COULD NOW BE TERMED SOCIALIST IN THEIR
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PHILOSOPHY, IT IS THOUGHT LIKELY THAT SHOULD THEY COME TO POWER THEY WOULD NOT REVERSE THE SOCIALIST MEASURES TAKEN BY THE DIRG, E.G. NATIONALIZATION OF INDUSTRY AND BANKING. AT THE SAME TIME, ERITREA WAS NOT SUBJECT TO THE SAME FEUDAL LAND TENURE SYSTEM THAT EXISTED IN THE REST OF ETHIOPIA, AS THE VAST MAJORITY OF LAND WAS HELD ON A COMMUNAL BASIS. THE ELF HAS NOT ADVOCATED ANY SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN THIS SYSTEM.

3. IN SUM, THE ELF SHOULD BE VIEWED AS LARGELY NON-DOCTRINAIRE IN PHILOSOPHY, AND PARTICULARLY BY COMPARISON TO THE PLF. THE PLF MANIFEST THEIR MARXIST ORIENTATION IN NUMEROUS WAYS, AND THEIR FORMER HOSTAGES REPORT THAT EVEN YOUNG INSURGENTS MOUTH MARXIST JARGON. BY CONTRAST, ELF CADRE DEFINE THEIR STRUGGLE AS ONE DIRECTED SOLELY AGAINST ETHIOPIAN REPRESSION, AVOIDING ANY BROADER TERMS OF REFERENCE.
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Message Attributes

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